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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000029

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TAGS: [KCRM](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: CBS REPORTER RICHARD BUTLER FREED

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CLASSIFIED BY: Howell Howard, Regional Coordinator, Regional  
Embassy Office Basrah, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: Kidnapped CBS reporter and British citizen Richard Butler was freed during the afternoon of April 14 during an Iraqi Army (IA) operation conducted as part of operation Charge of the Knights II (COKII). UK, U.S., and Iraqi authorities had been trying to secure Butler's release since he was kidnapped on February 10; contributed to the IA rescue. Butler is currently at the MND-SE hospital at Basrah Air Station (BAS), in good condition, and considering when he will fly from BAS to either the UK or France. An Embassy Interagency Hostage Working Group member has been working with the UK's Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) to assist in investigative techniques. Regional Embassy Office (REO) Basrah will report further details later. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S) Butler and his Iraqi interpreter were kidnapped from their hotel in Basrah city the night of February 10 (Ref A). Sadrists leaders consistently denied any Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) involvement, but a JAM Special Group (SG) has been suspected. The FCO, HMG's lead agency on this issue, were using Sadrists intermediaries to locate and pressure the kidnappers to release the hostages. Although Sadrists announced February 13 that both hostages would be released that day, only the interpreter was released. Butler was in Basrah (unbeknownst to REO or FCO) to arrange a meeting with Muqtada al-Sadr through Sadrists intermediaries.

¶3. (C) The FCO told REO Basrah that the IA came across Butler during house to house clearing operations during the second phase of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Operation Charge of the Knights (COKII). Elements of the IA 14th Division met armed resistance from a small group of JAM or JAM-SG in the Jubaylah district of Basrah City. The IA overpowered the group, who then surrendered; the group pointed out the nearby home of their cell leader. The IA entered that house and found Butler inside. Butler told FCO that he was forced to wear a hood during his captivity, but when he heard gunfire nearby he took it off and was therefore recognized as a Westerner.

¶4. (C) The IA immediately took Butler to Basrah Palace, where the GOI quickly convened a press briefing with "Iraqia" television showing Butler embracing Basrah Operations Commander General Mohan Hafith al-Fariji. CNN broadcast the story about an hour later. Coalition aircraft flew Butler soon after to the MND-SE hospital at the BAS for a medical examination, where he remains. According to the FCO, Butler has not made a decision whether he wants to fly back tonight or tomorrow to either the UK or France (where his wife resides). FCO also said everything

is going according to the plan emplaced to handle Butler once he was released. CBS producer Phillip Ittner was with him at the hospital. (Ittner has been at the BAS since Butler's capture.) Butler has since been released from the hospital and chatted with PRT members at MNDSE headquarters.

15. (S) Various investigations and negotiations had been conducted in the ensuing weeks since Butler's capture. Some investigators believed Butler was taken to Iran but was then brought back to Basra, perhaps when COK kicked off on March 24 (Ref B). Butler has said to some listeners so far that he has little information on his captivity as he was hooded the entire time. Negotiations involved a web of JAM-SG detainees, and investigations pursued information from many sources. The kidnappers made some demands, which were not met. The release of one Iraqi detainee held by MND-SE probably did have a part in the plan that developed to release Butler.

16. (S) Investigators believed that an arrangement had been made to have Butler released on March 25 or 26, but military operations in Basrah threw a wrench into that plan. Sources indicated that a reworked plan would have had Butler released around April 11. At least one source has acknowledged that the IA was given a tip to raid the first house. It appears that Butler was brought to the house where the IA then happened to rescue him on a tip. This resulted in an Iraqi face to Butler's release. The plan to have Butler released was related to his rescue by the IA.

17. (S) An Embassy Interagency Hostage Working Group member, trained in hostage negotiations and investigations, has been at BAS for some weeks working primarily on two cases, the kidnapping of four Crescent Security Group contractors (three Amcits, one Austrian) in November 2006 and the kidnapping of Amcit Ronald Withrow in January 2007. OHA and UK action officers mutually assisted each other, resulting in the recent recovery of the bodies of Withrow and three CSG contractors. The IHWG member also contributed to the Butler investigations.

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17. (S) One Iraqi was taken into custody during the IA raid. The detainee may need to be transferred to U.S. custody and transferred to Camp Cropper for interrogation, as MND-SE may not be able to detain him, due to the looming expiration the UN Resolution.

18. (U) REO Basrah will report further as more information develops.  
HOWARD